

Interview with Alphonse J. Sherman, 16 April 1986

Allen: OK. This is Wednesday 16 April 1986, and I am talking with Alphonse Sherman, commonly known as Big Al. When did you come to UB. Al?

Al: Officially on March 1, 1946. That was just about a month after I got out of the Navy. And this was a temporary job.

Allen: Where had you been teaching?

Al; I was teaching at Patchaug High School, prior to WWII.

Allen: And you spent a little time in the Navy?

Al: I came back here on a temporary basis, and -

Allen: And you retire officially, when?

Al: As of May 31 this year.

Allen: That is a long temporary job.

Al: Yes, i guess it is.

Allen: Why did you stay so long?

Al: Obviously I must have liked it. It turned out that we did like this area. We lived in Milford for a while.

Allen: What did you like about it?

Al: It was a challenge constantly, because it was changing all along. You didn't have a regular spring semester, fall semester, we had constant semesters. You have semesters starting when ever we had enough students to start. With the outpouring of all the veterans, coming out of WWII, and taking advantage of the GI benefits, and the Junior College of Connecticut at that time was very flexible, and as a result, they were ready to take advantage of all the opportunities that presented themselves. The old fashioned colleges, you would have registration in the fall and that is it. If they took a hundred veterans they were doing a big job.

Allen: Let me show you something from an editorial in the Bridgeport Telegram December 5, 1945. We had one tenth of all the veterans in Junior Colleges at that time.

It Said, "Contrary to the aristocratic and asture attitudes of some of the sister institutions, that does not and will not limit its enrollment as long as qualified students are here." there

was no telling the veterans they would be placed on a waiting list. Etc. Now that describes what was going on at that time. Now you taught accounting, right?

Al: Right.

Allen: What aspect of accounting did you teach?

AL: All phases of accounting. At that time it was just elementary accounting and advanced accounting. Then after that Mathematics and accounting, which was a offshoot from business mathematics, etc.

Allen: OK, now in addition to that you did some coaching.

AL: That's right.

Allen: What did you coach?

Al: Well, when I first came here, some one wanted to start a golf team, and the administration felt they had to have faculty advisor for this. Since I had played golf in high school and college, I was the faculty advisor. That was my beginning of handling the golf team for many years.

Allen: As a matter of fact, some of the faculty used to play with you: myself, Harry Kendall, Herb Glines, Charlie Petitjean, Em Chamberlain.

Al: That's when we had the faculty play the team.

Allen: That occurred up at Brooklawn. Littlefield took us up there and we played several times. And we didn't do too badly.

Al: No, no.

Allen: You also coached some football.

Al: Yes, incidentally at the same time, at the next semester, they wanted to start a track team, so they asked me to handle the track team, so I handled the track team for a while. The fellows were in not too good shape, they could not do what they had done prior to WWII. I didn't have the time and they didn't have the time to practice.

Allen: I remember later when Walt Kondratovich took over the track team, I went down to help in the shot put and he came to me and told me not to work out with the kids, because I was putting the shot further than the kids from a stand and discouraging them..

Al: That Happens.

Allen: How long did you coach football?

Al: Football started in 1948 and then I coached until 1950 when I was called back to the Navy, in November 1950. And I came back in '53, and I couldn't stomach any more football.

Allen: Where did you play?

Al: I played in high school, Yonkers High School, and then I had a scholarship to go to Columbia, Notre Dame, several other schools, and I ended up going to Washington and Lee University which had a good small school record. As a matter of fact, they were southern conference champions in 1934. We beat North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland, so they were in competition.

Allen: You played what, tackle?

Al: I played center, then they had too many centers so they pushed me to tackle. They had an All Virginia Center and All Kentucky center, and then they had me, an All Westchester County Center. And so, they didn't realize that there were more schools in Westchester County than they had in the State of Virginia. But that is neither here nor there.

They shifted me over to tackle.

Allen: In those days you played both ways.

Al: That is right.

Allen: Single Wing. Balanced or unbalanced?

Al: Unbalanced.

Allen: I played fullback, and in high school I played left guard, which was a running guard.

OK. What has been the highlight of your career at the University?

AL: The satisfaction that I get from the teaching of classes and helping the kids out. (?) (Spoke about meeting students who had been at the University.) Some did not recognize him in later years.

Allen: OK let's talk a little bit about some of the personalities. Did you run into Halsey or Littlefield very much?

Al: Littlefield wasn't here at the time, I ran into Halsey and Cortright.

Allen: Tell us something about Cortright.

Al: Cortright was a figurehead at that time. He was on the last legs. (?) But he had the front office and Jim had the office next to him. He was the guiding force of the Junior College. He was ready to retire.

Allen: Tell us about Jim Halsey.

Al: Well, when I came here he interviewed me for about 10 or 15 minutes, and I got the job and went to work right away. Because they were hurting for faculty at the time. But he was quite a gentleman.

Allen: And then did you get to know Littlefield well?

Al: Yes I did because, he was always the one who would be on the firing line. Keeping informed about what was going on. I just had contact with him.

Allen: The College of Business Administration was one of the first colleges and the first dean was Dean Tillot. Tell us a little bit about Tillot.

Al: He was quite a man. He was a master of many areas. He had the qualifications and background for it. And he was quite a - he was the kind of an individual, he taught some of the classes, the insurance classes, he started those up, what is now called the CLU classes, try to be underwriters for life insurance and casualty insurance. And he had classes of 40-50 students. But he only stayed here one year.

Allen: Why did he leave?

Al: I have no idea, I don't know, I don't recall.

Allen: He was succeeded by Eaton Read. He was dean for quite a while. Tell us about Eaton.

Al: Eaton ran by the book and very formal, we all wore coats and ties in the Business college. And he went through the chain of command. He used the department heads and left things to them. He was more or less, you might say, a military man. He went down through the chain of command. But we got along fine. Very strict, very formal. Now he lasted a long time. He also took his orders from the President or Vice President. He carried them out. He didn't try to fight them.

Allen: Now DeLeo and Petitjean were a couple of his chief aides. Let's take Petitjean first.

Al: Well, Charlie was just like Eaton. Charlie was for Charlie

Petitjean. He liked to build up his own department, which was only natural. But he was an eager beaver, you know the type (?) and he also wanted to get into administration in some way.

Allen: Frank De Leo?

Al: Frank DeLeo. He tried to do a lot of things himself. He didn't delegate much. He was a good man (?) He prepared the schedule and course offerings.

Allen: OK. Then, Fred Ekeblad?

Al: Fred Ekeblad. Good man. Again I didn't have too much contact with him. But I enjoyed playing golf with him. I had him out when we were playing matches out in Orange, Ct. He was a good athlete. I was surprised, he was a good golfer. Now, Fred, we got along fine. I didn't have much to do with him.

Allen: And then Frank DeLeo became dean. and then carried it up past 1974 which is as far as I am going.

AL: No pertinent comments. Fred Ekeblad, he had a boat, didn't use it very often, but he had similar interests, but we never did carry them out. He liked boating and he liked golfing.

Allen: Are there any faculty members that were especially memorable for any reason?

Al: We were all doing out job and actually you didn't know who was doing a good job or a bad job except through scuttlebutt from students. And sometimes, you get comments often enough, you would know that there was something behind that. And in our college, I think all were doing their job very well. Might have had a few that were sloughing off. But they followed the book and did their job. Frank DeLeo was a great teacher, Petitjean was a good teacher. In my department we had Grant Newton who was a good teacher. He left UB and went on to get his Doctor's degree and he has written several books. He is out in California. We have David (?) who was also in the Accounting department and who is now chairman of the Department up in Central Connecticut college. I don't know about the others. In the Accounting Department, we minded our own business and we did our job and many of us had two jobs at some times. We didn't pay any attention to what was scuttlebutt. When you had classes from 8 in the morning to 10 at night, you would be there at different hours than someone else would be there, and you didn't get together. You did what you had to do and if you had another job you went to it.

Allen: What kind of jobs do you mean?

Al: Well, another job off campus, like Frank DeLeo had a job off

campus, Chappie, Austin Chapman had a job off campus, Biagio Capolella had a job off campus. I had a job off campus, I was involved in the Naval Reserve as training officer, so that took care. I was involved with (?).

Do you remember the Junior Chamber? I was asked to represent the University.

Allen: I am sure that you have got some funny stories that have happened over the years, with faculty or students or administrators.

Al: Well, you ask about this on the spur of the moment, I would need some time, I don't know if I can recall them off hand. But in one of my classes, I had a couple of nuns, catholic nuns, and I got a post card from one of them at Christmas,(?) (Not clear).

Allen: Anything else?

Al: Not off the top of my head.

Allen: You were never involved with the Senate, were you?

Al: Yes I was the Secretary of the Senate when the library was dedicated and the cornerstone was laid, I was given the keys to the library.

Allen: The Carlson Library?

Al: That is right. I was a member of the Senate and I was Secretary of the Senate.

Allen: Tell us about the Senate.

Al: The Senate was a sounding Board for the faculty. But they never used it to the fullest extent. It was in the growing stages then and the reason why I got to the Senate, was because Jim Halsey Asked me. I got on because they told me I had to take it. That's how I got involved with it. Of course I was also on the Convocations Committee, chairman of that Committee, and that was quite a big thing in those days. Every student had to attend an X number of convocations in order to graduate. And we had some fantastic programs that were put on. Matter of fact, one of the programs that we had was Robin Moore. I mention him because he was in the news this month. But at that time he had written a book, "The Green Berets", so we had him up and I had to introduce him, I had charge of that particular convocation. That is why I remembered him when the publicity came out this month, that reminded me of the time.

And also we used to have foreign film festivals. We would put on at least one foreign film every month. And I had to assign some

one to supervise that, we had to get the projectionists, and take attendance. (?) And then there was the one controversial film was the one, you remember that got involved with the Jewish Community, it was about the German people and how Hitler had (?) I remember meeting with many, and Jim Halsey, myself, would have to, I got involved with Jim because of the convocations.

Allen: I had all of these things at one time or another too. We all had many extra jobs, didn't we?

Al: Yes, Well, I was in the dormitory, I lived in a dormitory, and I sold my house in Milford and came back, because I could save more money by living in the dormitory than in the house. I was in charge of one small dormitory and later on in charge of all the men's dormitories, about 150 students. And also one year I was in charge of the Student Center. With teaching and coaching and taking care of that.

Allen: Now the full load tat that time was 15 or 18 hours?

Al: Well, when I first came it was 18 hours, but they moved it down to 15 hours for a long time, then down to 12.

Allen: I remember those days. Why do you think the Senate never really reached its full potential?

Al: I think it was that the faculty didn't spend enough time preparing for what they wanted to do. You have a few individuals who might be outspoken and very aggressive, but the majority of us were not. Our main job was to teach, and we left administration to administration. Today you have several members on the faculty who would like to be administrators instead of being teachers. And as a consequence, we were progressive though. Compared with other colleges, we were, the university has always been steps ahead of other schools, but on the campus we may not have realized that. But we were way ahead. I remember (?) boasting they had increased their enrollment by 125 students from 900 to 1025. That was fantastic, here we had 3000 day students and 3000 night students.

Allen: You were also a veteran's advisor at one time weren't you?

Al: Yes. Right after I came. Well, what happened, the reason I got that was the veterans weren't getting their pay from the government, they weren't getting their pay because the forms weren't properly processed. If the veterans didn't get paid, the university didn't get paid, hence that is why they had me step in and do administrative work, to expedite the payments to the veterans and also to the school. I did that for several years. Until I got called back.

Allen: Any other humorous instances that you can recall?

Al: Not that you would want to tape. (?) (Something about a football trip and two fellows to each double bed.)

We played football down where the drive in theater is, Candellight. That was in a low section and the fog used to come in every once on a while in the fall. You couldn't see the players on the field, let alone know what was going on.

We started out using a bathhouse down at Seaside Park with no showers, then we got showers in a building and then the Gym. Fabulous compared with what we had had. We have come a long way in facilities (?)

Allen: Well, I thank you very much for this, Al. We have come to the end of this.

End of Tape.